Centennial Celebration
March 13, 1994
"Petticoat Politics"
Script

Petticoat Politics

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Cast:
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Voice #3 [Margaret Gould]

Narrator # 1: Good afternoon and welcome to *Petticoat Politics* , a presentation by the Woman's Club of Palo Alto in cooperation with the Women's Heritage Museum.

The readings you will hear ar quotations from the minutes of our Woman's Club from its inception in 1894 to the turn of the century. Since the Palo Alto Woman's Club was chartered as a member of the General Federation of Women's Clubs in June of 1894, only two months after the City of Palo Alto was incorporated as a general-law city, it seems fitting that the celebration of our centennial be a part of of the city's recognition of its 100-year birthday.

Arising in an era when women could not vote, the Woman's Club of Palo Alto offered the founding mothers and sisters of this community the support of other civically minded women devoted to improving the quality of life in their fledgling town. In particular, the 25 charter members of our club directed their energies at establishing a public school system and a library system, and also to further public health with the establishment of a public sewage system. These ambitious goals were achieved under the leadership of several remarkable women whose words we will read to you today.

Narrator # 2: Mary Grafton Campbell was the first president of the Woman's Club of Palo Alto. She was remembered for having a strong nurturing personality and for being a capable speaker. Having lost her own baby, she reared 13 girls and boys of other mothers in part or fully during her lifetime. Her sense of family comes through in her first address to the Woman's Club following her election, in which she "congratulated Palo Alto upon being no longer a sort of half-orphan but now having both city fathers and mothers, thus insuring a prosperous future, a nurturing of its spiritual and refining issues as well as its material welfare." [*Centennial Hist.* p. 70]

A former member of the Chicago Woman's Club, Mary Campbell realized the personal and social benefits of women's organizations as we see from this quotation:

Voice #1: Have we truly tried to realize in our own lives that the person who takes joy in the good that comes to another, has twice the chance to be happy

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than he has if he cares only for himself? These questions we must answer to our own hearts. Women are laughed at for taking their clubs so seriously. Men form clubs for relaxation and recreation–women for concerted work. But this very work, so different from their home work, is both solace and recreation; if we pronounce it recreation we describe what it does for women.

Narrator #1 : Mary Campbell's thoughts about the value of women's clubs was shared by many mothers at that time. Listen to the words of Eliza Tupper-Wilkes, of the first Unitarian Church of Oakland as she addressed our club on May 4, 1895:

Voice # 2: I support clubs as a training school for women. In these they hear their own voices.

As a mother of six children I speak from experience when I say that mothers need relief from their home duties. I want not a mother's meeting but a meeting of mothers, where they should hear not so much of *their* duties, but of the duties of fathers. They should learn of literature and science that the woman might take home and brighten the daily routine.

In the Woman's Club of Chicago it is not the woman who dresses the best, nor the most beautiful woman, who is asked to prepare a paper, but the one who can do it the best. This club does not hesitate to express its disapproval of a weak effort.

Women must get over this love of approval, working together to help each other to a higher plane, not caring so much how a thing is done, but is it worth the giving.

Narrator #1: When one considers that the General Federation of Women's Clubs was organized in 1890, just five years earlier, with the intent of bringing together "...various women's clubs from across the country that had formed independently to meet local needs of women in the new and growing nation," one could logically conclude that the establishment of women's clubs was a necessary precondition to getting the vote. However this uniting of women's energies and creativity in Palo Alto accomplished many other benefits to the community. Some of these accomplishments in the clubs first three years are enumerated in Mary Campbell's report to the membership in 1897:

Voice #1: The Woman's Club of Palo Alto is entering on the fourth year of its existence without storms or crises—a life of sincerity, affection and peace. It was christened on the twentieth of June 1894 and had 24 sponsors. It has now a membership of 110.

The objects of the club are stated in its constitution to be "self-improvement, mutual help and community work."

What have we done for the community? Our earliest impact on the community suppressed the foolish and annoying practice of charivari [pronounced shivaree], that so-called serenade for a newly-married couple made by beating on kettles and other household utensils. A small thing, but a distinct aid towards dignity and refinement.

Next we helped in establishing and maintaining a Friendly woodyard

which, while it gave transient occupation to many worthy travelers, seemed suddenly to diminish the number of unemployed and thus abolished itself: this too was worthy.

Then, under a committee of club women whose enterprising chairman was Mrs. J. W. Dayan, the beautifying of the station and the streets was undertaken.

The thought of providing the nucleus of a free public library next engaged the civic impulses of our women, and by means of an evening social, the admission to which was one book, some two hundred volumes, the main of real literary or scientific value were collected. Unfortunately, the club had no means of putting this library into circulation, and since activity is essential to growth, there has been little growth since.

The free reading room was the next community work undertaken. It is today frequented by a large public, and taxing the citizens very little—costing a few women considerable care and exertion and holding in itself the promise and potency of much good in the future.

We wish to increase our library and to quicken its languid circulation. The terms of access to it are the following: Fifty cents is deposited with the Librarian (Mrs. Corbert) and a ticket is issued to the person depositing this sum. On this ticket one book is given out at one time, the person whose name is on the ticket being responsible for the book. At any time the holder of the ticket may give it up and receive from the librarian the fifty cents deposited.

The young people of the University are to give a play for the benefit of the reading room very soon, and we do earnestly pray that together we make the reading room all that it ought to be.

Narrator #2: If education was a concern for Mary Campbell, it was a passion with Anna Zschokke. Zschokke is considered the "mother" of the Palo Alto school system, and she is numbered among the Woman's Club's three or four founding officers. A single parent with a good claim to being Palo Alto's first resident, Anna moved to Palo Alto in 1890 from Santa Clara. She was the widow of a pharmacist who had died of tuberculosis. She was left with three children to raise and a lot in the open spaces of Palo Alto that her husband had purchased so that their son could attend Stanford University. Remembering those days, Anna's daughter, Irma Zschokke said:

Voice #3: [IRMA ZSCHOKKE] "We settled at once in a tent under a tree next to our lot, then into a two-story, newly built barn, then into our new house...Our house was the first one to be built in the town of Palo Alto. We soon had a lawn with a border of roses and a row of fruit trees. Beside our driveway, our fence was promptly covered with grape vines taken from our Santa Clara vine...the streets were graded through the fields."

Narrator #2: The daughter of a Swiss immigrant who had settled in Indiana, Anna's love of learning made her an important force in the Woman's Club. When she realized that the distance to the Mayfield schools was more than two miles, she persuaded the city fathers to survey the community to determine whether a school for the residents of Palo Alto was feasible. Anna understood how to gather information--for several years, she was the official

town census taker, and she kept a record of all newcomers, births, deaths, and new businesses, a compendium that she published in 1897 as the Pioneer History of Palo Alto. We hear again from Irma Zschokke.

Voice # 3: Irma Zschokke: " A school was desperately needed in our town, so the first one was built in three days [on Bryant near University Avenue] by all available able-bodied men. It had two large rooms with a wood stove placed halfway through the partition, allowing heat and noise to spread...."

Narrator #2: Anna wrote about the dedication of that school building:

Voice #3: [Anna Zschokke] "On Admission Day, 1893, we assembled at the school house to celebrate a flag raising with appropriate exercises. We were a happy crowd, especially the mothers of school age children, who were there in force." Seventy children registered.

Narrator #2: This school house on Bryant Street, now commemorated by a plaque, was soon replaced by a two-story, six-room school house on Channing Avenue, for which the town passed a $15,000 bond issue. Initially the elementary age children studied on the ground floor, while the high school students studied in the upper two rooms. Students paid a monthly tuition of $6.00 At this time, the influx of new students was so great that the grammar school pupils took over the Channing Avenue building. There were no funds to build a high school. Anna, probably assisted by friends from the Woman's Club, oversaw the building of two free-standing buildings "with good plumbing." The larger building was for classes and the smaller served as a laboratory. Funds for this first high school came from a Swiss family fund of Anna's, set up to benefit anyone with the Zschokke name. These buildings at 524 and 526 Forest Avenue remained the high school until the City passed a $20,000 bond issue and built a larger one in 1901. At that time, Anna moved into the larger of the Forest Avenue buildings, and remained there for the rest of her life.

Narrator #1: Anna Zschokke wasn't the only member of the Woman's Club of Palo Alto to distinguish herself for her efforts to stimulate the intellectual life of the young community. Another charter member of the Woman's Club, Julia Hughes Gilbert, dedicated herself to establishing a public library system with the help of other club members. After two years of effort, including book socials at which members contributed a book or money, and a gift book sale, the Woman's Club opened their first lending library in the bookstore of H. W. Simkins at 166 University Avenue. Club members served as librarians and issued library cards for fifty cents. Mrs. Gilbert is credited with raising $1,000 to form a circulating library in 1898. When the library was officially turned over to the town trustees in 1902, it had 2300 volumes, served 1,000 readers, and had cost the Woman's Club of Palo Alto $3,387 to establish. In her report to the Woman's Club, Julia Gilbert wrote:

Voice #2: [Julia Gilbert] Our effort was to study the peculiar needs of this town

and to meet those needs without reference to the stock plans of the usual library. No book has gone on our shelves until it has been investigated from this point of view after the literary quality and moral tone has been passed upon. In addition to providing good literature, we have tried to keep abreast of the time by seeking authentic world publications, military, social, or industrial, and avoiding as far as possible partisan publications.

Narrator #1: In the context of the standards established for selecting books for the library it is interesting to note that the only prerequisites for membership in the Woman's Club of Palo Alto were intelligence and respectability! These resourceful women even resorted to grant writing, applying for matching funds from the Carnegie Foundation to establish a permanent building fore their library. The Carnegie funds were received thanks to their efforts, and the town's first public library opened where City Hall now stands.

Voice #2: These first members of the Woman's Club were as practical as they were intelligent. As early as March 1895 they recognized the health hazards of living in a community whose residents now numbered more than one thousand and yet had no sewerage system while depending upon their water supply from wells. Consequently the Woman's Club had the following resolutions printed in the Palo Alto Times:

Resolved: that the Woman's Club of Palo Alto, whose membership consists of the mothers, wives, and daughters of the citizens of the town,realizes its share of the responsibility for the public health, and desires to give its best aid toward removing these sources of danger, and it is further

Resolved that we, as members of this Club most respectfully urge upon the trustees of the town of Palo Alto to submit immediately to the voters of Palo Alto, the question of the issuance of bonds sufficient in amount for the construction of a system of sewerage, adequate to the present and commensurate with the prospective needs of the town.

Narrator #2: Initially the town fathers did not respond to these pleas. However, a few years later, in 1898, Helen McGillivray joined the Woman's Club and galvanized energies in support of "a proper system of sewers". A nurse by profession, Helen and her associate Mary Maxwell ran a cottage hospital and nursing home known as "the Cabin", located at 465 Melville Avenue. That same year she addressed the club at its May meeting held in the Palo Alto Hotel. The minutes from that meeting record that:

Voice #3: "The parlor was decorated with flowers and a delightful musical program was presented. After that pleasant interlude, the subject of sewers was discussed and Miss McGillivray gave a talk on the construction of cesspools, many of which she said were mere holes in the ground. A resolution was adopted advocating the putting in of a proper system of sewers as soon as possible. The rest of the afternoon was devoted to balloting, tea drinking, and social chat!"

Narrator #2: Thanks to pressure from the Woman's Club and other groups, by

1899 a bond issue was passed to finance the first underground sewer line.

City beautification was also a priority for these women, and many had personally planted and cared for many of the city's trees. Mary Lakin later remembered watering the saplings on University Avenue from a horse and buggy, to keep them alive. The club subgroup concerned with these matters was called the Village Improvement Committee. On April 11, 1900, they sponsored landscape architect George Hansen to talk to them about parks and street improvements. Excerpts from his talk quote him as saying:

Voice #3: I would like to draw attention to the fact that nature had already given us a grand landscape in our oaks, and urge that they be preserved at any cost. Every effort must be made now, before it is too late to acquire a piece of ground for a public square. It should be in the heart of town where it is most needed. The San Francisquito creek has in it the possibilities for the making of a beautiful park or boulevard. The creek is one of the natural charms of the town and something should be done at once to secure it, and protect it from being made a dumping ground for rubbish.

Narrator #2: Not all of the club's beautification efforts were well received by everyone. Replying to criticism from the newspaper, Julia Gilbert spoke for the Woman's Club when she wrote the following letter to the Palo Alto Times on March 1, 1904:

Voice #3: A year ago the Woman's Club appropriated $130 for the improvement of Alma Street. An extensive correspondence was carried on with the best horticulturists in the state, and the Linden tree was decided upon as best suited to the climate, the conditions, and the purpose.

At the northern end of Alma, we wished to screen the railroad embankment and the fence from view. We found some fine pepper trees already planted there and we added to the number. Time, effort, and money was spent in keeping these trees properly watered.

Now your newspaper is urging the Club to pull up these trees and plant something that will elicit the comments of the passing tourist and convince him that there is no natural difference between Southern and Northern California.

It would not be amiss to call attention to the ten-year effort to make a palm-lined street of University Avenue. Palms were planted the entire length of the avenue, planted and replanted, cared for personally, watered and trimmed and cultivated with private and public funds; constantly for five years, intermittently afterward.

Narrator #1: The Woman's Club members were concerned with improving their surroundings and they were also concerned with improving themselves. Self-improvement included many topics of interest to women among which was the topic of health. When the Club heard a lecture on dress, it dealt not with the latest fashions, but rather with the relationship between dress and health.

By 1900 women were no longer wearing the five or six petticoats that they had in the 1850's. However the steel and whalebone corset which created an

impossibly small waist was still part of the fashionable wardrobe.

On August 5, 1896, Dr. Clelia Mosher gave an address on "Dress in Relation to Health". She began by quoting Dr. Bowditch's statement, "At puberty the girl has outstripped the boy, at the age of 16 the boy passes the girl and she never again catches up." This is due to two causes: first, habits and activities; second, dress: that of the boy being for utility while that of the girl is decorative.

Showing a small skeleton, she pointed out the positions of the internal organs of the body, and explained how they are changed by the clothing the average woman wears; perhaps because her mother did the same before her, perhaps because the demands of fashion seem to make of woman only a figure upon which to put drapery.

Describing the various articles of women's clothing, Dr. Mosher said that too many garments were worn. They are too heavy and not warm enough. A chart made from personal measurements showed the difference in breathing when clothing is worn and when removed. This drew forth many questions and a discussion.

Narrator #2: Dr. Clelia Mosher earned her Bachelor of Arts in zoology from Stanford in 1893, and a Masters in physiology in 1894. Two years later she entered Johns Hopkins Medical School where she studied menstrual cycles, previously regarded as a disease. She contended that many of the problems associated with menstruation were a result of negative expectations. To counter these she suggested that women eat simply, wear unrestrictive clothes, exercise regularly, and participate in athletics. She even designed a set of exercises to lessen menstrual pain by strengthening the abdominal muscles. Based on her research and observations, she wrote a book, *Personal Hygiene for Women*, which sold five editions in the United States and England.

Narrator #1: In addition to health, these early meetings of the Woman's Club of Palo Alto concerned "the woman question," an umbrella term embracing the right to have a career outside the home and to simplify housekeeping, as well as the right to vote. Speaking to the club in 1894, Dr. Ross, a sociology professor from Stanford University, observed:

Voice #1: [Ross] One of the primary rights of woman is the right not to marry. It used to be the case that to marry was the only way for a woman to earn her living. But if she has the right not to marry unless she wants to, she must also have the right to earn a living, to enter industry. This involves a right to fit herself for her work, to enter universities and professional schools, to be measured by the same standard as men, and to receive equal pay for her work.

For the married woman there is a whole list of rights: To the sacredness of her person; to the equal control over the children; and not to be burdened with too many children; to hold property independently; to divorce on the same grounds as men; to be judged by the same standard—not to lower woman's standard, but to raise that for men. If it is wrong for a woman to gamble, a man who gambles ought to suffer the same social condemnation.

The housekeeper has the right to simplify her housekeeping so that the

home may be the servant to the happiness of its inmates and not oblige the mistress to be its slave.

Narrator #1: Progress was on the move, and only 14 years later, the Woman's Club heard the following in a talk given to the Club by Mrs. A. M. Coburn, which clearly showed that women were moving into realms previously reserved for men.

Voice #1: There is no new woman, but the old woman has discovered herself. From the first woman physician in 1848, have come 8,000 today in this country.

From the first three woman graduates of Oberlin in Lucy Stone's day, have come the uncounted college girls of the present. Fifty years ago, a girl seeking a college open to her could hardly find one. Now she can choose from more than fifty.

From 35 women employed in factories in 1839, have come thousands of women now engaged in such labor. In 1840, a teacher, if a woman, was paid one dollar a week and boarded around. Now several states by law allow women equal pay for equal work.

Years ago women ministers were not allowed in the churches, with the exception of Unitarian, Universalist, and Quaker. Now only two Protestant churches forbid such appointment.

The successors of the first woman lawyer number 200 in New York City alone.

The census now announces that one in six of all women in this country are earning their own living.

Women are deeply concerned in the laws relating to child labor, in the very large numbers of children now day laborers, instead of pupils in schools; in laws which forbid night labor and extra hours of labor of women and children in some states, and the laws relating to the control of property, wages, bequests, etc. and the laws relating to the guardianship of children. She now owns her own clothes by court decision, and may choose her religion, as was not allowed formerly; but a married woman's wages are not her own, and the children are the fathers' in this state, and in 31 other states.

Narrator #2: Many of the speakers were women who in spite of all the obstacles were able to work successfully in a profession usually reserved for men. One such woman was Mabel Craft, editor of the Sunday magazine department of the San Francisco Chronicle. At a meeting in 1900, she spoke about journalism as a career for women. Here are a few excerpts from her speech:

"Some writers have taken the ground that the moral pressure of a newspaper office is too great for girls entering the business world and that her natural delicacy will prevent her from doing the work that must be assigned her, as well as her co-workers, thus handicapping her in competition with men.

"It was only in 1870 that the first woman 'reporter' was known, in 1880 there were fifty, and in 1890, a thousand.

"Yet the old prejudice against women is still dominant and though she is

not jeered at by a mocking, incredulous crowd and forced to the gutters while out on her business, still the editor or copyist is always ready at their first mistake with the remark that 'all women are alike and not particular enough.' If the work is above the average of that given in by the men, then it is, 'Oh, well, she is one in a thousand, a rare exception.'"

Narrator #1: As women in California and the nation at large pushed back the constraints on controlling their own destinies, it was obvious that they needed to be political equals with men so that they could share in influencing the legislation that defined society. Right from its onset, the founding members of the Palo Alto Women's Club were dedicated to getting the vote for women. Our first president, Mary Grafton Campbell, persuaded David Starr Jordan, Stanford's first president, to rearrange the University's calendar so that Susan B. Anthony and her companion, the Reverend Anna Howard Shaw, could speak in Memorial Church. Later, in 1895, Shaw spoke to the Woman's Club about the work of Susan B. Anthony, noting how much society had improved in its views of Anthony's work on behalf of suffrage in the 40 years she had been agitating for reform. Likewise, Anna Zschokke, although better known for her contribution to the schools, was also a crusader for women's right to vote.

In 1899, having launched the school system and established temporary housing for the high school, Zschokke became one of the founding members of the Palo Alto Political Equality Club. The primary purpose of this group was to educate the citizens about woman suffrage issues. On one noteworthy occasion, she organized a club meeting on *drudgery*. After quoting from various articles on the subject, she led a group discussion as a kind of community forum in which it was concluded that women hate boring and repetitive tasks as much as men. There was a common misconception in the 19th century that women were better suited to boring chores than men.

Narrator #2: Suffrage discussions weren't limited to the Club's leaders. In 1895, the well-known California suffragist, Sarah Severance, addressed the Woman's Club on the merits of club membership, especially as it enables women to become better informed so that they can ultimately exercise their educated judgment by voting. Here are some of Sarah Severance's comments as reported in the minutes of the Palo Alto Woman's Club that day:

Voice #3: We cannot make the best of ourselves unless we meet others; all need society. The Club takes women from the quiet of their own homes and brings them into contact with those who go about.

Women need knowledge. The Woman's Club assists its members along lines of reform, ancient history is not so important as the present. Women should be instructed in social purity, international white slavery, the snares that are set for her sons and daughters, temperance, and the saloon, the center of all evil. She must be able to give her child its first lessons in physiology, including the effect of alcohol on the system, and encourage him to read of those who have done something for the world morally, instead of the biographies of fighters.

The woman of the club studies the political questions and affairs of the

day, that she may be interested in what her husband and sons are talking about. She realizes that politics does not corrupt, that the government is corrupt because corrupt people are managing it. If given a voice, she would try a remedy in the same manner that she would handle incompetence in her household.

There are statistics proving that to give woman the ballot could not "double the corrupt vote" as 'tis said. Women should have choice in their environment, choice in government, and choice of those who exercise it. They must get the power to do their duty--and power of choice means the ballot.

Narrator #2: According to the account of this event recorded in the Palo Alto Times: "A storm of questions and objections came upon the speaker from the audience which was evidently hostile to his ideas, but Professor Powers is never so much at home as when engaged in debate...Miss Shaw [a Club member] did her best to combat his arguments, but by far the cleverest reply was made by the President of the Club, Mary Campbell. She admitted the truth of the Professor's statement, but claimed that after the period of child bearing was past, a woman would have leisure and inclination to devote to public life or a profession."

Narrator #1: Some Palo Alto Woman's Club members worked with other local organizations to advance the cause of suffrage. Annie Corbert, a founding member of the Woman's Club, was also State Treasurer of the California Equal Suffrage Association. This organization had 3400 members in San Francisco alone. And she was also President of the local Political Equality Club. Their efforts gained momentum as the 1896 election approached, in which suffrage for women was a key issue. The Political Equality Club published five articles in the Palo Alto Times, which probably contributed significantly to the 71% favorable local vote. But suffrage failed to get the necessary votes statewide that year.

Narrator #2: The turn of the century did not necessarily turn men's minds, and many continued to express varying opinions on the proper role of women. Stanford Professors continued to lecture on the subject. In November, 1911, Professor Green of Stanford gave his advice about their role in politics to the newly enfranchised Club members, as reported in the Club minutes:

"With the enfranchisement of women, you should study civic questions and have the training to take up the work. At this age, about middle life, the men are usually occupied with their most serious problems of life, either in professions, business, or affairs of state. Women, having reared your children, have the serious business of life over. Many of you having servants are perfectly free to assist in civic movements.

"There are many big questions now, the paramount one being, Who should control the big business and moneyed interests? There has been a progressive movement sweeping the state and in municipal control of our cities, the power is now in the hands of the City fathers and mothers."

Narrator #1: The most nationally renowned suffragist who belonged to the Palo

Alto Woman's Club was Alice Locke Park. Even before she and her family moved to Palo Alto following the 1906 earthquake, she had protested Jane Stanford's establishment of a female quota for women at Stanford. Although Jane originally imposed no limit on the number of women the school would admit, accepting any qualified student. The result was that women flocked to Stanford. By 1898, 40% of the students were women. Probably out of fear that the institution she had named for her son would become known as a women's school, she limited female enrollment to 500, despite great opposition from many, including Alice Park.

Voice #2: Once established in Palo Alto, Alice Park joined the Woman's Club and made her home a distribution center for articles and flyers on pacifism and women's rights. Her dissemination of information on these topics through the articles she wrote and the speeches she gave made her an important advocate for women's voting rights worldwide. She also promoted concepts that were revolutionary for her time--birth control, sex education in the schools, and legalized abortion. She wrote a newspaper column carried by more than 600 newspapers and penned several pieces of California legislation. One of these was a landmark bill passed by the California legislature in 1913 that gave equal guardianship of minor children to both parents, changing laws that gave the father sole guardianship.

Alice Park was decades ahead of her time on many issues. As a pacifist, she argued against giving children toy weapons. She traveled to promote world peace as a delegate for the Women's Peace Society and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. In keeping with her dedication to nonviolence, she protested the Palo Alto Woman's Club's holding meetings at the National Guard Armory.

Her last involvement in a suffrage demonstration occurred eight years after California women gained equal voting rights with men and one year before the 19th Amendment passed that enfranchised all women in the United States. When Senator James Phelan arrived in town to make a speech, Alice and others picketed him, claiming that he had not voted for woman suffrage in Congress. Thanks to the efforts of Alice and others like her, California became the nation's sixth state where women gained equal voting rights with men.

Narrator #1: Let the minutes reflect that we here, on this 13th day of March, 1994, thank our City foremothers for all they did that resulted in our present happiness, honor the members of the Woman's Club of Palo Alto who continue the tradition of good fellowship and community service established a century ago, and help them launch, with good cheer and best wishes for their continued success, the second century of the Woman's Club of Palo Alto.

The End